

ABSTRACT

An improved system and methodology for tracking and controlling access to objects such as keys, narcotics, jewelry, and the like is provided. The system includes a storage unit in the form of a lockable cabinet for storing, dispensing, and receiving objects contained within security containers. A computer controller is coupled to the cabinet and includes a user interface. The methodology includes verifying that a user requesting an object from the system is authorized and, if so, retrieving the security container containing the requested object from its storage location within the cabinet. Information about the object or objects within the security container is extracted by the system and conveyed to the control computer, where it is stored, before the container is dispensed to the user. The extracted information may include the weight of the container and its objects, a digital image of the objects in the container, the density of objects in the container, the magnetic characteristics of the objects, or any other information by which the objects themselves can be identified. The container is then dispensed to the user. When the user returns the container and objects therein after use, information about the objects in the returned container is again extracted by the system and conveyed to the control computer. The control computer compares this information to the stored information extracted about the objects when the container was dispensed to the user. Based upon this comparison,

the control computer verifies that the objects in the returned security container are the objects that are expected to be in the security container. If they are not, then theft or tampering is indicated and the computer takes remedial action such as setting
5 alarms or identifying security personnel.